

Points of View on Franco-British Defence Relations

Edward Llewellyn - Catherine Colonna

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This month marks the ten-year anniversary of the Lancaster House Treaties, signed in London by Prime Minister David Cameron and President Nicolas Sarkozy. The Treaties ensured mutual military cooperation between the UK and France. To mark the occasion, we interviewed British Ambassador to France, Lord Llewellyn, and the French Ambassador to the UK, Catherine Colonna, to get their views on the past decade of Franco-British defence relations – and how the Treaties continue to influence their countries' future.

1. EL - How would you describe the state of the Franco-British defence relationship, ten years on from the Lancaster House Treaties?

EL - The Franco-British Defence relationship is close and strong and is based on good, solid foundations. The Lancaster House Treaties set specific goals, many of which have already been achieved. The Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (CJEF) is one such example. It draws upon both British and French Armed Forces to provide a deployable force able to operate on land, in the air and at sea. The way its command and control, and the supporting logistics, work is a defining and symbolic example of the Franco-British relationship. There has been some ambitious work over the past decade, and there are a number of interesting areas for the future, such as space and cyber security. The Lancaster House Treaties provide an excellent framework for this kind of collaboration.

CC - I fully agree of course. The Lancaster House Treaties reflect an age-old strategic proximity that is both lasting and essential. *Age old* because of our common history: the creation of our countries has spanned over a thousand years, one against the other then together. Our cooperation is lasting, not only by virtue of geography from the Pas-de-Calais to the Anguilla Channel, but also through our common values and our strategic culture. And it is more than ever essential with the return of superpowers since, as President Chirac reminded us in 1995, “...we cannot imagine a situation in which the vital interests of one of our countries might be threatened without the vital interests of the other being similarly threatened”.

2. CC - How has the development of the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (CJEF) developed the Franco-British defence relationship across the three single services?

CC - The bilateral expeditionary force, the CJEF, was built up from the principle that our two countries possessed both the military capabilities and the political mechanisms to act remotely, rapidly and decisively. Since then, the strategic environment has worsened considerably, with entrenched terrorism and uninhibited power struggles. Our politico-military advantages have remained the same whilst the spectrum of use of the CJEF has broadened: the level of interoperability that has resulted from these ten years of common training and increased readiness allows us to envisage bilateral action over a far wider range, from simple aid to the population following a natural disaster, such as after hurricane Irma in 2017 in the West Indies, to the most complex action at the upper end of the range, such as Operation HAMILTON in Syria in 2018.

EL - Indeed, the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force has enabled both countries to explore and develop the relationships between our forces. The CJEF has had a positive impact on the capabilities across all of our services – it has led to better mutual understanding, and has highlighted areas for improvement. Bringing together headquarters and units has resulted in common operating procedures, meaning that both the French and British forces have been more effective and, therefore, more confident working together. Undoubtedly, this will benefit future potential Franco-British operations, and the strengthened Franco-British defence relationship will also enhance both of our countries' membership of NATO.

3. EL - How do defence attachés and exchange and liaison officers stationed across the UK and France, and present in both Embassies, complement and deliver on the aims of the Lancaster House Treaties?

EL - Exchange and liaison officers in both countries act as a network to deliver a number of bilateral projects, drawing on a range of capabilities. The projects vary in scale from one-offs to other, more enduring initiatives, and include not only the CJEF, but: exercises at sea, on land and in the air; meetings to develop common understanding in domains such as space and cyber; sporting events; and twinning between British and French units. These networks, which consist of embedded officers in each other's countries, enable both forces to work together more freely and effectively. Over the past ten years, the work of these officers has made it normal to exchange and share not only people but, crucially, ideas and experience which strengthens both countries' Armed Forces.

CC - With more than 50 soldiers, sailors and airmen, notwithstanding some fifty French naval personnel working for NATO at Northwood, the French military liaison and exchange network in the United Kingdom is the largest in the world. Several French military engineers are also integrated within the planning

offices in Bristol on the bilateral ANL/FASGW (*anti-navire léger*/Future Anti-Ship Guided Weapon) project and the multinational *Meteor* programme. Beyond the immediate interest of these exchanges, I firmly believe that in the longer term they contribute to developing the close relations between personnel and a common strategic culture that the great British historian Hew Strachan reminded us are most often the key to victories, quite apart from the capability for combat.

4. CC - How did the Lancaster House Treaties facilitate Operation BARKHANE?

CC - The French commitment to Mali from 2013 was founded on the firm conviction that our security sometimes hinges on what happens thousands of kilometres away. I believe that our British partners share the same conviction, as they have demonstrated on several occasions through their support in the UN for our action.

From the military point of view, the valuable British contribution to Operation BARKHANE demonstrates three things: solidarity, complementarity and interoperability—three characteristics at the heart of CJEF culture.

EL - The Lancaster House Treaties have helped facilitate British engagement in support of the French Operation BARKHANE and we have seen an increased level of Franco-British cooperation in the Sahel. Since our two militaries were used to working together, the arrival of the RAF's CH-47 (Chinook) force into the Operation in Mali was smooth. Former exchange and liaison officers were central to the operational command structure; they drew on the personal relationships they had built and a prior knowledge of each other's ways of working, which helped greatly.

5. CC - The Lancaster House Treaties ensured Franco-British cooperation on counter-terrorism. What moments relating to this work stand out for you from the past decade?

CC - In 2015, France was struck on its own soil by a number of terrorist attacks planned, commanded and claimed by Raqqa. France and the United Kingdom then very closely cooperated in the struggle against Daesh, in particular within the framework of our operations in the Levant. So it was that, when the aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* had to sail on alert, on each occasion we were able to incorporate a British escort frigate into the naval-air group. Our air forces were able at short notice to conduct air raids on Syria, intended to reduce this terrorist threat.

This level of integration of our forces in such a demanding operational environment, under threat and without prior notice, cannot be achieved to order: it is the fruit of compatible equipment, common training, liaison officers and common HQ staffs patiently developed over a number of years.

EL - Over the last decade, both the UK and France have had to deal with the tragedy of terrorist attacks on our home soil. The shared threat that we are facing only makes us more determined to work together; cooperation between the UK and France on counter-terrorism has never been closer. In 2017, following the Manchester attack in the UK, President Macron walked from the Élysée Palace to the British Embassy to express solidarity with the victims of that horrific attack. It was a touching gesture, which reflected the close bonds between our countries, our shared sacrifice, and our determination to stand united against terrorism.

6. EL - In light of last December's 70th anniversary NATO summit, how does the Franco-British bilateral defence relationship complement the work of NATO?

EL - The UK and France work closely together on defence bilaterally and multilaterally, particularly in NATO. A fine example of this is the French contribution to the UK-led NATO enhanced Forward Presence deployment in Estonia – the French joined us in 2017, in 2019 and will come again in 2021, providing an essential part of the UK-led battle-group deployed there. There are numerous other domains where close UK/France defence cooperation supports NATO efforts towards increased capability, interoperability and cooperation between Allies. As Europe's two major defence powers, both members of NATO, with armed forces of a similar size that are expeditionary in outlook and activity, the closer we work together, the more effective we are as NATO allies. As a development of the Lancaster House Treaties, France and the UK have exchanged contingents of ten Army personnel between our NATO HQs – the ARRC near Gloucester and the CRR-FR in Lille; these detachments (although small) allow us to build the bridges needed to maintain effective and close cooperation as key NATO Allies.

CC - Those bridges are important because it should not be forgotten that the foundation of NATO is the Treaty, which includes a collective defence clause that requires not only unfailing political commitment but also available, trained and interoperable military capabilities. Our military budgets, our regular commitments to training and operations, and the interoperability of our materiel and tactics are clear benefits for NATO. An example of this is the programme that France and the United Kingdom have been jointly conducting for five years to develop a maritime mine warfare system based solely on naval drones. This programme is today giving us a major lead in the field— in two years from now France and the United Kingdom will be the first countries to possess such a fully qualified and operational system.

Furthermore, France and the United Kingdom, the only European nuclear powers, contribute to the deterrent of the Atlantic Alliance. They do so in distinctly different ways because France does not participate in NATO's nuclear planning mechanisms. Through the high level of mutual confidence ratified by Lancaster

House, our two countries can also discuss the role of deterrence in today's world and from that contribute to the nuclear culture of the Alliance. Finally, through the common strategic culture acquired by virtue of this partnership our two countries can together contribute effectively to the thought processes conducted within the Alliance on the nature of future conflict—for example, on the role of emerging technologies, the future of space defence and cyber issues.

7. CC - The British and French militaries accounted for half of EU defence spending and two thirds of research and development. How has EU Exit affected Franco-British defence policy, for example, by enabling a possible security agreement?

CC - We must, of course, take account of Brexit but I would remind everyone that our two countries are, and will remain, permanent members of the UN Security Council, nuclear powers and constitutional states, concerned to defend democratic values. And I certainly do not forget the degree to which, from the Somme to Arramanches the United Kingdom has contributed to the security and freedom of the European continent throughout the course of history. The United Kingdom outside the European Union stays in Europe and remains a key strategic partner for us on a great number of issues. Our two countries will remain committed to the security and stability of Europe and its neighbourhood, be it through our cooperation within NATO, our bilateral cooperation or via collective mechanisms—here I am thinking, for example, of the European Intervention Initiative, which is a rapidly-growing instrument that is contributing fully to defining our common European strategic culture. For the rest, and in particular any future association between the United Kingdom and the European Union on security and defence matters, much will depend on negotiations currently underway. But whatever the outcome I have no doubt that, as the President of the Republic said in London on 18 June 2020 in commemorating the 80th anniversary of the 18 June Appeal, *“Free and sovereign, we have each taken control since then of a European destiny, a universal inspiration fuelled by the spirit of resistance and which compels us never to stop working together to be fully ourselves.”*

EL - That's right - the UK/France defence relationship remains very strong. While the most visible examples of this are the UK's continued commitment of CH47s to Operation BARKHANE in the Sahel and the French tanks and infantry company which have taken part in the Enhanced Forward Presence in Estonia, it is important to note that we also train together at sea, ensuring the vital access of our maritime trade routes. In the maritime domain, we are already making plans to co-ordinate our mutual Carrier Strike capability next year and our ability to work together in the undersea environment is increasingly important. It is the Army officer working on joint plans in a French headquarters, a Royal Navy officer standing watch on a French frigate and the RAF pilot flying the aircraft returning injured French soldiers that embody the relationship and translate it from

words to actual deeds. Our close cooperation will continue to develop as we move forward into our second decade of Lancaster House Treaties cooperation.

8. EL - What do you think the short- and long-term effects of Covid-19 will be on the Franco-British military relationship?

EL - The British and French militaries both used links – formal and informal – to exchange ideas and work to support our respective Governments during the Covid-19 pandemic. This has reinforced our bilateral relationship. In the long term, Covid-19 has prompted us to look together at our resilience planning. In so doing, we will learn from each other by sharing best practice. We have exchanged information that made the medical evacuation of Covid-19 patients by air more effective and, looking forward, we are sharing lessons learned with regard to resilience planning.

CC - I was also struck by the way our cooperation continued despite the difficulties presented by Covid-19. In the first half of 2020 the multilateral naval force CTF 150 was commanded from Bahrain by a Franco-British combined staff. French exchange officers were brought into the London District HQ in the framework of Operation RESCRIPT, whilst British exchange officers participated in Operation RESILIENCE in France. The health crisis has also led us to develop solutions for electronic communication, including at levels of confidentiality which we had been lacking for ten years and which are a basic building block in the construction of our interoperability. The current context shows once again the extent of the challenges presented by resilience, network protection, control of supply lines — particularly for defence materiel, oversight of investment and understanding of how security might be affected by environmental and natural phenomena. It also demonstrates that in the longer term dialogue and cooperation on these matters are needed at the pan-European level and beyond. It seems to me that France and the United Kingdom have a vocation to contribute to this thought process.

9. EL - The Sandhurst Summit included an objective to develop a joint vision for the Complex Weapons sector, as part of a long-term strategy to achieve efficiencies in the delivery of military equipment, while minimising national constraints and strengthening our common defence technological and industrial base. What progress has been made since then? And how do you see co-operation in this area in the coming years?

EL - Cooperation can help meet the needs of our militaries and help to enable our industries to remain competitive in the world market. This is a real focus for the next ten years. The Complex Weapons Strategy Steering Committee has been working on an improved government-industrial framework for cooperation. Built on the long-standing complex weapons International Technology Partnership and the industrial Centres of Excellence established in 2016, the Committee will make more rapid use of technologies in new and updated missiles.

And there's more to come: we are also looking at other ways of cooperating over the short and long term, combining our national capabilities and technology road-maps.

CC - The general lines followed at Sandhurst are a continuation of the *one MBDA* initiative launched during the Lancaster House Summit in 2010. The objective was to consolidate common industrial project management between France and the United Kingdom and to make it a European champion on the international scale. By dint of the inter-governmental agreement on missile systems signed in 2015 the two countries have aided and supported intensive integration of the French and British branches of MBDA in a number of technological areas. They have also accepted a principle of mutual dependence never before seen in Europe. This model has now proved its effectiveness and we can probably go further. The joint FC/ASW (future cruise/anti-ship weapon) project will be structured in this manner in order to continue with industrial cooperation between our two countries in the field of missiles.

10. CC - Noting that the UK and France are following different paths on Future Combat Air, how do you see co-operation in this area in the coming years?

CC - Faced with an unprecedented worldwide increase in numbers of new generation combat aircraft and drones, our common strategic interest is above all to each possess high-performance air combat systems appropriate to the threat and in sufficient numbers. That depends on a complex equation involving our military needs, sustainability of our defence industrial and technological bases and our allies' equipment—elements that do not always converge as extensively as we might wish. Be that as it may, in view of our common interests and our reciprocal commitments we will need to be vigilant so that our respective systems are interoperable tactically in order to conduct combined combat operations on demand, as we have on several occasions proved we are able to do with our current aircraft.

EL - I concur entirely that we will have to ensure that our respective systems are interoperable and France and the UK will continue to work closely as the respective programmes develop to ensure the interoperability of capabilities in the future. Both countries remain committed to the UK-FR Technology Development Co-operation programme.

11. CC - Over the last ten years, UK-France Summit commitments have expanded beyond security and defence. What do you think will be the main talking and action points of the next Summit?

CC - The politico-strategic context has changed a lot since 2010: new players have emerged suddenly onto the international scene, our national debts have been worsened by the Covid crisis, the United Kingdom has left the

European Union and the Transatlantic link has evolved. Above all we must identify the consequences of these disruptions and attempt to determine their consequences for the next ten years and beyond. But I believe I can already predict that our need for cooperation has been strengthened as much by the resonance of the threats, including those from more ethereal sources, as by the need to make the most effective possible use of limited resources.

EL - And we are in discussion about the plans for the next UK-France Summit. We have a shared ambition for a summit that will cover a broad range of issues. Some of these will be continuations of the key successes of the Lancaster House Treaties; for example, we will look to develop further the CJEF, especially on the important issue of the exchange of data. We will explore the hitherto nascent domains of cyber and space. Other key developments will be in cutting-edge technology, such as Artificial Intelligence and Big Data. More broadly, the Summit will look at furthering the links between our peoples, which we have already noted as being critical, and ensure that we are working together on solutions for the future challenges that both the UK and France face – not least geopolitically, environmentally, and in the Covid-19 context. It is significant for the bilateral relationship that the UK is also hosting both the G7 and COP26 next year.

12. EL - 2020 marks not only ten years since the Lancaster House Treaties, but is also a significant year for commemorations – notably the 80th anniversary of General de Gaulle’s BBC *Appel* and the 75th anniversary of VE Day. How have you marked these occasions on either side of the Channel?

EL - Victory in Europe Day on 8 May marked the first in a series of summer commemorations, including the triple anniversaries of Sir Winston Churchill becoming Prime Minister, General Charles de Gaulle’s *Appel* of 18 June 1940 – indeed, this is the year of de Gaulle for France – as well as that of the Dunkirk evacuation. At the Embassy, I marked the 75th anniversary of VE Day with my Defence Attaché by observing a two-minute silence and laying a wreath at the foot of our bust of Churchill. I also had an enjoyable interview with Churchill’s grandson, Sir Nicholas Soames, on the anniversary of VE Day about his grandfather’s ‘love affair with France’, via videoconference. Despite these challenging times, as Covid-19 continues to have a huge impact in France, the UK and around the world, it was touching to see how others had adapted to celebrate VE Day. From socially distant street parties across the UK to tricolour flags adorning French balconies, I was proud to join in the commemorations on both sides of the Channel.

CC - The *appel* of 18 June is celebrated every year in all military establishments in France, and beyond. We are forever grateful to the United Kingdom for having offered asylum to General de Gaulle and to the first *résistants*, and through them to the spirit of the Republic. This gratitude was materialised this year in the presentation to London by President Macron of the *Légion d’Honneur*. That is just

the start, for we are entering a five-year-long memorial cycle, which, once we recover from the Covid crisis, I hope will allow us to stand side by side at the many memorial sites and to honour this bilateral relationship to which we owe so much.

13. EL & CC - Franco-British cooperation extends from the 1904 *Entente cordiale* to the 2010 Lancaster House Treaties. How do you envision the future defence relationship between the UK and France?

EL - The UK and France share a long history. In 1843, Lord Aberdeen, the then British Foreign Secretary, wrote of the ‘cordial, good understanding’ between our two countries. One hundred and sixteen years ago, these shared values were embodied in the *Entente cordiale*. Then, in 2010, again in London, a new accord was signed: the Lancaster House Treaties, the 10th anniversary of which we celebrate this year. Today, we continue to support each other and work closely together, with our military cooperation epitomising this friendly bilateral relationship. A relationship which will, I am sure, endure and flourish far into the future as we continue to tackle together unforeseen and unprecedented challenges and grasp opportunities, as well as take the time to mark the many milestones of our joint successes. Perhaps my successors will see a future Franco-British defence relationship that is integrated, seamless and cohesive so that we have a truly embedded partnership that reflects strongly the consistent drivers that link us: geography, global vision, common values and democracy.

CC - I fully share Ed’s very enthusiastic vision. All the fundamentals are in place for developing this strategic relationship. Brexit does not change those fundamentals. All the same, it marks a new step and will stimulate us to have a fresh look at our partnership. Let us not forget that so doing has often been the precursor to collective mechanisms, both Transatlantic (Treaty of Dunkirk) and European (Saint-Malo). It is now up to us to work together to give it new dynamism and a new direction, and in affording us the opportunity to reflect on what has been accomplished and on the challenges to come this tenth anniversary of the Lancaster House treaties gives us the necessary impetus.

Let us also not forget that history can be tragic: if our alliance is essential it is because the world today is more dangerous and unpredictable than ever. And since the very first *Entente cordiale* it has been during storms that our friendship has been cemented. ♦